SCRIVENER

CREATIVE REVIEW

Issue 46 Spring 2025

SCRIVENER
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Masthead

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A Letter From the Editors

Scrivener was born at least forty-five years ago, with a burnt-orange cover (courtesy of an unknown "Régine") and a flurry of snail mail, using xerox as a verb and charging $1.50 for an issue. Classifieds, windowsills. We were not without our detractors, apparently. In 1981, *The McGill Daily* reports nine hundred and fifty copies were stolen from "the Scrivener office," wherever that was. Covers like newspapers, mid-century monochrome type. The only accounts of these years are etched in yellowed receipts and pre-flexographic compendia, echoed in the indices of *Canadiana* and one odd aughts volume subtitled *Incisive Fiction from Emerging Writers*. Much of this happened before "Hallelujah," with F.R. Scott's *Fortnightly Review* and Louis Dudek's Great Writings class in its periphery. By the nineties, our slim magazines took on odd shapes, thickened, interviewed Anne Carson on uncoated paper. Around then defunct URLs began to collect hundreds, thousands of poems and stories and glimmering oddments, though still soliciting readership from bulletin boards and filling mailboxes with manuscripts in manilla envelopes. We drop off sometime after 2010, pick up for a moment, take another hiatus during the plague years. This is the history of the magazine, Nobel laureates unmentioned.

Now, in 2025, *Scrivener* is back. Resuming its wake. Such an endeavour would not be possible foremost without the immense talent we are grateful to feature in this issue. Nor without Professor Eli MacLaren and the mastheads of today and yesteryear, who have given this magazine their indispensable time and energy. We also owe many thanks to the AUS Creative Initiatives Fund and Special Projects Fund, along with the Department of English Student Association, for their financial support.

Enjoy the next forty-five years of *Scrivener*. Certainly, enjoy issue 46.

Until then,
Izzi Holmes and Jacob Sponga ★
Editors-in-Chief

Hart Crane on the SS Orizaba

Derek Webster

Twelve years earlier
it ferried soldiers
into Europe's bloody arms.
Decommissioned, it welcomes
with canapés

the poet of rivets and girders
tortured
steel.

Speaking in code making passes
at the crew Hart, hurt

ices his eye, wipes his leaky nose
In Chagrin
Falls, back home
his father
lies in state, on ice
newly dead: Hart
spies his face
in candied waters.
The Gulf below.

Nothing awaits
in Manhattan. Guggenheim
gone, no green.
Perhaps
he sees himself reborn
down there
unable to bear
a human weight
Mossy, entranced
to sink under blackened rainbows
soar
with emerald turtles
and spongy rays
yet still self-hate

the salty desert
in his mouth, the sailor
thirst he cannot slake.

Goodbye everybody

Framed in warped heart
brass portals
blue green bed beneath
he jumps –
transported
lit up, Hart
enters the Great
White Way.
The sea
strong poem
insistent
enters him.

Esplanade Avenue
Derek Webster

The growing universe of vintage cartoons
throws its soft physical humours at problems
twelve minutes and a frying pan
cannot resolve –

and all through the glorious truant months,
last year's poems shimmer
like used cars
in licorice lots, vinyl seats hardening in the sun.

The summer starts to take its leisure.
Metered streets under spreading trees
go unwalked

and dogs, not poems, are put through their paces.
Unpedaled, upside-down, ticking backwards,
my mind wavers.

Bible Story

Derek Webster

At the place of sacrifice
among the trees
some greater creature
intercedes.

Blade lowered,
Abraham cuts the throat
not of a child
but of a goat

grazing nearby.
The man whistles
to his dog
and so loves the world

he roams it, mounting
his enemies' heads on stakes,
eating brain.
At dawn, birds

spread the news
of his coming
and reluctant bears
lope off to hide.

Chortling choirs of angels
in red-spattered aprons
continue to love him
without condition.

Kim Symbol

Cristina Holman

Cool bar. Feels like I'm wearing
eels tonight.

This chartreuse shot tastes like a waterslide
feels. Hair slip

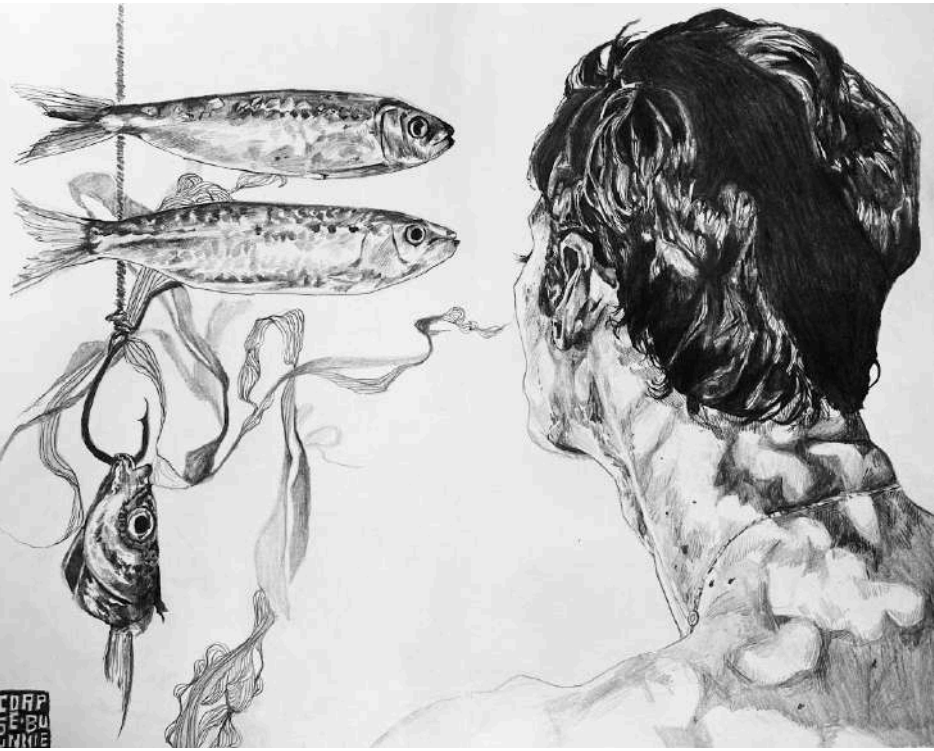
I turn too quick my next
shooter is down I suck
the lily
pad of liquid up.

I flip through text messages

each says Be Determined Stay Determined

At the window I see heaving
firs oiled grins
each sitting in a little spotlight

I should be named Kim Symbol
I should live in a pit of Symbols
stack them up
climb out



Pulp Sophie Cao

Glaze

Cristina Holman

I see it thicken

and I know that it is dumb. Gel only knows
about covering. Five o'clock tangerine
sun float. Heating me. I see kids doing punches
in the studio downstairs. I write lean poems and eat.

Leave all art events. Get licked—
thick orange gel
out of everywhere. Let your features

glaze. Big slick face.

Take nighttime pictures of your reflected body

in bus stop ads. Pose yourself pressed

against advertising giants.

Print and hang them in your rented room.

In one photo I reach toward Aquaman as he gazes at a hammerhead.

Every night I sleep on my side
to prevent drowning. And I wake coughing spitting on the pillow.

The Whip-poor-will

Hannah Berger

There used to be more birds in the sky. But human life was harder. Each day, one hundred billion songbirds beat against the wind and soar wildly into the mirrored windows of office buildings, hoping perhaps to bring home reams of printer paper to eat and regurgitate and feed to their brood. Instead, they are sent spiralling off in a shock, little stars and cartoon birds spinning around their very real, fractured bird heads. They die like that, alone on the hot concrete. Every city has at least one such tower of paper and mirrors, always surrounded by gardens of dead downy feathers and cracked skulls like apples.

We have carelessly rigged the whole world in our cultural unawareness of the values and prizes of nonhuman things. This is what implored me to walk around with my mouth wide open all day, neck craning, my body's largest cavity made vulnerable to the whims of the world.

You did not acknowledge that you saw me on the train, but I know that you did. Many others were watching as I maintained the slackness of my jaw, their eyes darting in and out, wondering privately if it was not just the identifying mark of some disability. Your eyes went in and out, too. It was a speckled and pretty afternoon, and you wore an Aran sweater that made you look like a sailor. At once, I felt the tap tap tap of the pebbles you had once flung at my window half-ironically, wry smile. The train car rocked and creaked like a gunship, and then you were gone, and as you disembarked, I felt your concerned but reserved look, the look of a stranger.

I was jeered at outside. A man walked up St. Catherine Street dressed in clothes so soiled they almost smelled sweet. His plaintive cornflower blue eyes were ringed in red, and he walked like a new colt or a wagon with one bum wheel. A yellow Lay's bag tumbled about the brown snow like a playing child. I found a bench and sat, tilted my head back, mouth still wide open, gummy and dried out now.

I thought, if I am still enough, a tiny window will appear. It will present itself to me, will glow warmly at me, but will not open for me. Desperate and solitary in the built and mirrored world, I thought, I will kick the window in. I will swaddle my arm with my coat and punch it right open. Glass is hazardous to bald skin but harmless to the bony dragging feet of flying things. I can't remember how long I must have sat there in the cold, inviting in some sort of natural transgression or food, some understanding from a giant mother bird who would instantly recognise such a pink, naked, frightened thing.

Soon after this, I quit my job and gave up my lease. I could no longer stomach the common casualties piling up in the streets, the desperate people and tiny skeletons, half wings spread red on the tarmac. I rented a house on a couple acres of land far enough from the city, a dry brown place with tufts of long grass and the songs of frogs at night. Alone, I felt satisfied. Silence and stillness, life's circles ironed out into one lazy line. I could hear the wind stir each leaf in the trees, could watch the trees change as towers never do. I cut my hair very short and did not dare speak out loud. This pleasure was abruptly cut short one night by the only thing that could have severed it.

I slept naked that night like I did every other night. I knew I was alone in the house, but I did not feel alone. Tension prickled in the base of my neck. I switched the yellow lamp on and propped myself up like a reclining Etruscan. At the moment of the lightbulb, a whip-poor-will hit my window hard, fluttering, dizzy, leaving a feathery seraphic imprint on the glass pane.

Dimitri Roussopoulos

Interviewed by Millie Roberts

Dimitri Roussopoulos is a Montreal-based publisher and activist. In 1969, he founded Black Rose Books, a non-profit, independent press dedicated to publishing leftist works. Scrivener's Millie Roberts and Nora Mahli visited Roussopoulos in February. Their conversation follows.

The headline of Saturday's edition of the *Montreal Gazette* stares up at me as I wait for movement through the glass-panelled door. Eventually, Dimitri Roussopoulos makes his way into my field of vision, and we are let inside. He glances between my co-interviewer Nora and me, and I make their introduction. Roussopoulos chuckles, "Two for the price of one!" We remove our shoes and place them onto unoccupied copies of the *Gazette* resting at the front door. I can't help but wonder if the Sunday copy that he asked me to pick up today will soon be joining them.

Roussopoulos's house is a historical, late-nineteenth-century townhouse in Milton-Parc. Embellished with colourful art, overflowing bookshelves, greenery, and crown-moulding in every corner, the space is saturated with life and an abundance of detail that cannot be captured in a single purview. A radio plays classical music in the background as we gather in his living room. Light streams in from large windows that look down to the tree-lined street below, with rows and rows of similar—yet remarkably idiosyncratic—townhouses packed tightly together.

Though it's hard to imagine a reality in which anyone would wish to demolish these vibrant walk-up buildings, the neighbourhood was targeted by a private developer in the 1970s, with the aim of evicting residents to build high-rises and offices in their stead. In response, Roussopoulos, alongside the late Lucia Kowaluk, fought back. "I worked very hard, along with many others—Lucia, a remarkable woman—to prevent speculators from

destroying this six-block area in Montreal, not only because it is a heritage neighbourhood, but also to create a social project."

This led to the creation of the Communauté Milton-Parc, and ultimately, the success of their venture. "We created a geographic project consisting of twenty-two small cooperatives and non-profit housing associations federated together on a land trust. There's no private property in the Milton-Parc project. We've abolished private property in a downtown, capitalist city. We've removed the psychological desire and economic aftermath of owning your own house."

He gestures to the wider space. "This house here, this nine-room house in which you find yourself—I, and the other people who live here, have all the rights of an owner of a house. Of course, if I want to bring down a wall, I have to ask my co-op permission to do it, but everything—the comfort, the security—is all here. For a human being in our society, where greed, profit, and viciousness is celebrated, to have security of residence leaves a psychological foundation and a sense of freedom that most people in our society unfortunately do not have."

"You need a space, a physical space, out of which you can create all sorts of things. Just recently, we established a cooperative bar across the street. People meet there, socialize. Having meetings in your co-op, or bumping into neighbours on the street—all of that is very reinforcing. You have to have a sense of geography; you have to have a sense of space. You have to have security in certain areas if you want to live an unconventional life, if you want to live as a dissident."

Dissidence has been a defining feature of Roussopoulos's life. A lifelong activist, he traces the roots of his political engagement to his time as an undergraduate in the 1950s, along with the back-to-back bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. "There was an unconscious or semi-conscious discomfort, which even we as undergraduates felt." He references the 1955 Russell-Einstein manifesto as a turning point. "They warned us about the imminent danger of a thermonuclear war. For the first time, there was reference to a war breaking out accidentally."

In 1958, Roussopoulos went on to continue his graduate studies in London, where he got roped into joining the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament by a few friends. "There was a march, presided over by Bertrand Russell and J.B. Priestley, and some of the great names in English theatre, music, literature, and all the rest of it. It started in a town called Aldermaston, which was the home of where Britain was making their

nuclear bombs. Three of us decided to go."

Roussopoulos tells us that the march, which was later named the Easter March, reached its end in London's Trafalgar Square, where Bertrand Russell himself performed a speech to a crowd of tens of thousands of people. "I could hear his crackly voice, saying, 'Has man a future?' Anyways, I was smitten." He had caught the activist bug. Roussopoulos continued to advocate for nuclear disarmament upon his return to Canada after completing his degree.

"By the time I arrived back to Montreal in the fall of 1960, there were chapters of the Canadian version of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament all across the country. When they picked me up from the airport, four or five of my good friends asked me, 'What are your plans for the future?' I said, 'I want to do a PhD.' They said, 'A personality like yours? You don't need a PhD. We need you here.' To make a long story short, I didn't go on to do that. Instead, I became very much involved in the movement, and one of the roles that I played was writing and being an editor. I founded a monthly newspaper for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and I founded a peace research journal, originally called *Our Generation Against Nuclear War*."

He picks up a paperback book sitting on the coffee table next to him. It's an edited collection of essays that were published in *Our Generation* during its production, running from 1961 until its last edition in 1994. It includes writings by the likes of Noam Chomsky and a preface from Bertrand Russell. "I can't believe I had the audacity to write to Bertrand Russell," Roussopoulos chuckles. "And I can't believe he wrote back." As the sixties came to a close, Roussopoulos expanded into the world of book publishing, founding Black Rose Books in 1969—a nonprofit, independent radical press that still operates to this day. "I became very involved in the publishing industry as a whole. I had to learn all these things. What did I know about editing? What did I know about bookstores? Or how do you get books into libraries?"

"One of the major features of book publishing is that the publishing project has to be connected with the outside world in one movement or another. You really have to have an ear to the ground. You have to know not only what the issues are, but how these issues are articulated or not being articulated well enough. You can't do that by simply being a passive recipient of manuscripts and taking the author's word. One of things I have always tried to do with Black Rose Books is to go out there and get manuscripts, not just to wait for them to come. You have to be proactive."

Speaking of the current state of Canadian publishing, Roussopoulos is unimpressed. "You see the stuff that is being reviewed: it's not very interesting. So, reading becomes a part of the entertainment culture, and not in any way that's cutting edge. The result is that our type of publishing has become even more minoritarian than it was. In June of last year, we published an excellent novel. Has there been a single review of it? Nowhere."

"The question of public funding is an easy solution, but it's a very corrupting issue. There's no controversy. There's no debate. You cannot have a democratic society without real public debate. That's where the great ideas were generated in the old days." From all of the anecdotes that Roussopoulos shares with us, it is clear just how much dialogue dictates his activism. He acknowledges this: "It is important, in my view, to have a politics that is interpersonal." This is most evident as he reflects on the 1959 Easter March to London.

"When you come from an alienated society like North America, where people never have the opportunity to get to know each other in a personal way, as human beings. You have difficulties connecting with people. But, for the first time in my life, I saw that the people who marched to London were ordinary people. They were ordinary people who were very troubled. They were very concerned. They were very outgoing, and in a word, they were very human. I was touched by that sense of togetherness. The compassion was genuine and sincere, something I never found here [in North America] and that had on a subjective level, touched me very, very deeply."

He stops briefly, gazing out the window. "As we marched into a town called Reading, just outside of London, the sidewalks on both sides of the street were filled with people. In their hands, many of them had yellow daffodils. They were either giving us [in the march] the daffodils or throwing them in the air. Isn't that such an interesting balance?"

He looks back at us. "It's important for everybody to understand that even in a highly materialistic society, which is what Canada, and the United States, were after the Second World War, even our parents, who were obsessed with having a television, a car, a washer, a dryer, a house for the summer. Shopping was the highest form of cultural activity. And even in that atmosphere, people could be troubled. If that sense of trouble can somehow connect with other people with similar feelings, well, all sorts of possibilities can emerge."

The music reaches a crescendo. I ask Roussopoulos if he finds today's political climate similarly generative for activist mobilization. He thinks for a moment. "Your generation is a generation that is conflicted, in the sense that they know something is wrong. At least at the back of their minds. They know that they should celebrate growth for the sake of growth, production for the sake of production, material comfort, and, above all, to make sure to have a career. Nevertheless, there's something wrong. They don't know how to articulate it, but they know it's there."

"There is another factor that didn't exist with my generation: in the near future, there is a very heavy, heavy dark cloud that is hanging over us that is the very likelihood that the planet will collapse. And so, the people of your generation, they say, 'Well, we will enjoy the moment and forget about the future.'"

Roussopoulos isn't entirely unhopeful. "What comes to mind immediately is a quote, or semi-quote, from Oscar Wilde: human beings are born rebels. They rebel. That spirit is being triggered again."

"The notion of community building is extremely important. There are people who live in housing cooperatives, who know what it is to not only know your neighbour, but to work with your neighbour in order to make your housing project successful and viable. You aren't educated at university to know what community is. How do you build it? The universities capitalize on producing apolitical people, people who think only of themselves as entities who live in a vacuum. We have to learn it ourselves. Or you're fortunate enough to live in a house such as this, or to bump into people like myself, and press buttons and read a book together."

Naturally, the conversation turns to the recent U.S. presidential election. Roussopoulos remarks, "There has been a change in Washington, and President Dump was elected. The whole story about the 51st state—well, for the first time, Canadians are beginning to say Canada is not for sale. It has never happened in my lifetime before, to the extent that it exists now."

"And we have to be open to that, intelligent enough to see how we could contribute to that. Maybe out of this new wave, something will glue together." He pauses, smiling. "Hopefully, with the exception of Alberta. They can take them."

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

If I Were Adam

Susan Robertson

I'd call you *curved-beaked killer*
of scurrying in the leaves; you

upside-down scrabbler
scaling trees. You, I'd call

stutter-stop stalker on the lawn
cocking your head. You'd be

wing-whistle flight from the feeder;
you, *clasp-clawed small*

that eats from my hand; you,
stained-glass plumed.

I'd call you *feather-flurried*
season changing hued.

I'd call you *you*.

Plato's Man Cave

Tim Loveday

Struck between civilisation & the savage
between, God & an animal—

You open the earth like a meteor
exhume the remains of your ancestors

in search of a pickaxe, a whale bone,
an ocarina, anything to hang above your fire

place: you are the first & the last killer—
the thunderclap that collapses the sky

into a keyhole, a keychain dangled
around Vegeta's neck, proto–

typical Prometheus, your cock out
at the party again—your silly string

cobwebbing the Manhattan cityscape:
fire-branded, mosaic, metal-necked

You eat livers bigger than those
For recess, fart out constitutions

odes, redundancies: don't eat sour grapes
in the morning after, a precursor:

small apples make your hands
look massive: between your palms

high pressure, the conditions of
distilling diamonds in the rough

house, where you built yourself up
& with only the faintest waft

of barbeque, of late-nights
of whisky-breath, of pillaging

your mother's closet, looking
for heels high enough to score

the soil—before the planting of
the seed: here is the fractious

fractured thing, banished from
the city, shadow-like & later struck

up, cape-esque: a fraught interpreter
of flags, an inferior carpenter who builds

his own gangplank: open as if a mouth
& jams his fist in, asking why so hungry?

ice fishing

Alex O'Neill

i gaze at his decaying albertan teeth
functional
patched
buttered
and oiled;

buried
in toxic wasteland

of chewed gums

and frozen ponds

four quadrants deep

like the playground sand
that prints hard currency
until it doesn't

Strand

H.E. Fisher

Sorting clothes a year
after her funeral,
I found a single strand
of my mother's hair
on her good wool plaid suit
I was folding into tissue paper
to preserve. Her remains.

Not knowing what else
to do, I let the pale strand slip
from my fingers,
watched
it feather from me.
The air opened to make room for it.

No one would believe what else
I've thrown away.

Angelfish

Zoe Lubetkin

When you get to the top floor, the tiles shine teal. The courtyard languishes in the center. Blistered and fragile. Speech bleats from below. Language you haven't bothered to learn. Sacha turns to you and pokes the gate behind which peelpaint doors sleep.

"This should be the address," he says.

Your head wilts over the railing. You slouched off the plane so early your vision feels ribbon-thin. Below tenants sit on upended plastic buckets. Only in action do men become important, you think. You turned in the final midterm paper last night. Rose before the sun to let the cab window press a crease into your cheek. Tripped off the plane's open-air staircase in tight hungry arcs. The cab driver scoffed at his Canadian bills, so you gave Sacha slivered American money to hand to the other man.

In the Flow Dana Prather

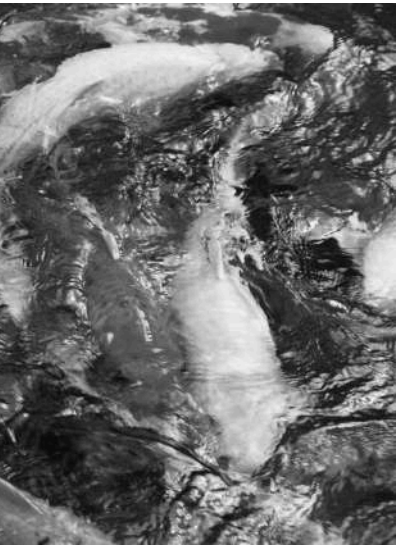
"Do you speak English?" says a woman below. Her toes splay in flipflops. Humidity extorts her dark hair.

"Yes," you say. "It's the only language we speak."

"I'll wait until you come down, then," she says.

In the darkness of the stairwell, you watch his face slump and reform.

When face to face this woman tells you: the room you rented cowers beyond the first door marked with the correct numeral and shirks inside the second. Duck into the doorway and wrest your luggage up a flight of stone stairs—later, you'll return past midnight and find a woman in leggings and printed slides hunched to mop these stairs, and you'll wonder at first why a passage that was agape all day but shut firmly when you two went out, giggling, you a little uncertain on your heels as you pass your wallet and lighter to his pocket to free your hands, is now a door wide open to the street at an hour when the streets are pools of light and difference, but then you'll see her and the xanthic bucket, and understand that work must be done hidden from sun, the door must unlock past midnight. Note it: that is later. The woman in the courtyard says now, go at the top of the stairs. Ask for Elena at the gate. But find the keys first from the deli below. Elena will collect payment at the end. Your stay, how long? You are American? Canadian. American. Blurs together if you squint. Up you go.



Sacha speaks a bit more than you. He waits in line at the deli, you melt outside, you have backpacks and sunhats and wool socks and skin. The corridor tightens with bodies. The owner directs his son to show you the lockbox key. It is your second time up these stairs, each with the canvas duffel in your hand and the straw cloche hat on your head, the one you both were certain you should pack—it would be funny, you said to each other, it will feel so newlywed vacation. Sweat shapes wings in your cotton blouse. You can't remember why newlywed was something you wanted to feel.

You unlock the tall door and throw down your luggage. He settles bottled water on a bench by the door. Sand abrades the red tile; the apartment doubled would fill half your student three-bedroom at home.

Light cowers through a window that reveals the landing and the courtyard beyond that. For the entirety of your trip, this visibility will alarm you, and you will resist throwing open the window or tying the curtains up to let sunlight thud into threadbare sheets.

But at this point, you are sticky, sweaty, you are not the trip's entirety, you strip and slump onto the white cotton. He locks the door and joins you. You flex your feet flat into the bed. Try to be as big and intricate as possible.

"We made it," he says, "should we celebrate?"

You laugh. He places his palm where your hump would be if you were a camel and never ever needed water.

*

In the evening, you shower and the room thickens with wet air. The fan creaks a sonatina: for the rest of the trip each time you enter the washroom a smell will greet you like flood, or bog. You walk out wrapped in his thin towel. A minifridge recoils in the corner, but you lack food with which to stock it. The sinkwater delivers slow and tinged.

He returns with bottled water and a beer.

"I thought you went to get something to eat," you say.

He releases the beercap with his teeth. "Forgot."

"That's why you left in the first place."

"When I entered the deli they asked for my shoes."

You check his toes, protected in their leather shine. "Oh."

"Apparently they're harder to get here," he says. "But they're my shoes." He hides the bottles in the fridge, pressed belly to belly. He counts the cash you took out from the ATM on Parc in the blizzard, tucks it into a little pouch.

Lying next to him, the moisture leaves your skin, but you still feel heavy and scented. In your sleep, you touch him, and he endures a moment before slipping away. You rise to crack the window, and the courtyard bright pushes in, silvered, stale. His body on the bed, twisted sheet, unsettled. Where did you get this idea? That it is not the most base of impulses to love him while he sleeps.

At night, you wake at the fridge door's click. You hear him crack the cap of the last bottle and swell with a crest of anger. You could have been thirsty. Your tongue in its teeth. His teeth against the bottle. You should have expected. He has these moments, his instincts tightens to fit only him, and you collect these instances, think of them when you want to feel bad.

From outside the bugs hum while you pretend to dream. He comes to bed. He skids across the sheets and gathers you, your hair against his cheek, flutters from the hip. There are no flies in the apartment, no motion at all. Your first boyfriend once pulled a lice bug from your hair. It squirmed under his nail. He loved you for years after that.

*

To turn back and ascend the stairs is a comfort. The road is so loud here, the drivers stare, on the cabs women cut out of sticker paper splay reclined and ready. Why do you walk on the road? Where do you seek? Far from your coursework and your city's alleyways, piles of husked leaves. You have no reason to pass notes, you don't say his name when you break silence anymore, who else would you be speaking to? He's the only one.

After your walk, you recoil to the room. In the morning the day waited to sediment into form. When you reached for him and kissed between his ribs, you had not yet remembered where you were. So the skin of the day bled into burn, uncomfortable shoes, and again inside he reads his anthology. You crave fish and salt. Neither of you leave the water in the fridge long enough for it to chill.

You take the twin bed, coral sheets like blush, you cock your head when he strips his shirt and sits straight on the taller bed where you two sleep. For the evening, two priorities: you want to get to the water, he wants a drink with ice. Tomorrow for dinner you will order a whole fish. You picture its perfect plated form. Its flesh skulks under your tomorrow-tongue.

Before you go out, you stand under weak water and try to wet all your hair. You palm rose blush soap. You smell like your first Communion until the sweat returns. He flips through your book at random. He's hungry, he invokes different meats, he isn't sure what he wants now, what to savour at lunch tomorrow, he wants a cigarette, but he smokes

only after he's eaten.

"You have time," you say. "You have options."

He raises his eyes. "Not really, here."

The space where the lid meets wall in this shoebox room bulges outward in elaborate geometric layers. Like someone forgot to tell the sculptor that a column could not encompass an entire wall. You point it out when he emerges from the bathroom enveloped by mist, and he spends a while with his head cast up. He says it is convex. His throat flexes at the syllables.

He touches the curve of your spine. He wraps himself in dark colours. He absorbs heat in his blush and ease, he gulps water, he is ready to leave, and you bend over to buckle your sandal, skittish. Your dress giggles against your thighs, red like the conclusion of an itch.

At the bar, you play rummy. You get the cards sticky because you pluck mint from the drink to eat. Pull the leaves from their pale purple stem. Order a second round.

"Are you having a good time?" you say. The days of warmth have lifted him, sips of sun sloshed from your walks before the pursuit of the shade.

"I've never been anywhere like this," he says. His rum and coke trips down the gullet.

The patio is on the water, and you leave through a garden; the wet petals wilt to the weight of the air.

"I didn't realize," you say. "How bad it is."

"I wouldn't have suggested it," he says.

Does this settle you? He tucks hair behind your ear. "We made it out," you say, laugh. He recoils.

The streets sag dark and slow. The tourists sleep early. The menus in this neighbourhood invoke foreign currency: you pay it, or he does, with a relief that persists through the shame.

A child asks if you want a paper flower, one language, another. Sacha buys it for you.

"You didn't have to do that."

"Yeah," he says. "But they would have kept asking if I hadn't."

You crush the flimsy flower into your purse to reach for his hand.

The room when you return—effervescent and drunk, you run first up the stone stairs, you pull your skirt up to show him, he chases and laughs, he catches you by the hand, you shove him away, he presses you into the window grates, you pull away and wait by this door for him to yank the key from the pocket of his linen shorts—is somehow still damp.

*

It is your last day. You pay in American money for the bus to the beach and anticipate its breath, sterile conditioned air into your mouth. As you wait, a man asks you for something. He directs his question at Sacha but looks at you.

"We have nothing, I'm sorry," Sacha says.

"Baby formula, aspirin? I have three kids."

Your mind goes behind the mirror in your bathroom at home. The bus arrives, and you pull your towel onto your shoulder.

"We're just students," Sacha says. "Sorry, man."

His face as you pass him—are you trying not to look?

The water is so blue you feel light. When you look at Sacha too long you feel double-jointed with joy. At last you've made it south. As if the water is a different country than the city you flew into. It is the first time you have worn the newlywed hat all trip: it fails to block the sun.

You catch the last bus, and the air-conditioning gasps harsh and dry. Skin smells different when dried in salt like this, prepared for the winter that brittles your return.

In the room, he leaves you to look for aloe and you lie on the bed to face the open door until he arrives with broken stem in hand and lets the cool gel weep from the pads of his fingers to your red nose, upper ribs, for him you try hard to lie still.

He takes off his clothes and turns on the TV. You come into the room a little while later, shiny after your second shower of the day.

"We leave so soon." He goes mattress-flat like you, like matches in the box. "Why did we come here?"

Here, you have found the afternoon provides better rest than true night. You've been coming back so late, greeting the woman on the stairs as she performs her midnight cleaning. You're giddy to be seen with him, late like this, seeping such joy, and more than joy, an ease, the access to anything one compels you to want, a high heady pulse that slows before you fall into bed. When you do sleep at night it's hot and fitful, and when you touch him, he jerks away.

"We didn't know," you say.

"We didn't think," he says, "we'd have to learn."

You are students on spring break: you play wherever you want. He gets up to unfold the window, ties the curtain, collapses against you.

"I was happy to spend time with you," you say. There is sand sedimented in your hair, against your scalp, and you feel dirty down to the space behind your eyes. You shift to hold him; you start to shake.

He lets out a tiny breath. "Take it easy," he says. "Will you hold me?"

As he falls asleep, you wonder how you would describe this place to him if he had not come. Would you call him when you get service, sitting in the hotel lobby on the square? What would you say? You like him because sometimes to you he seems perpetually unfurled, a kite. Or he did when you knew him in the city listed on tomorrow's boarding pass. If he did pick up: all the bodies are different, you would say, maybe it's the sugar. Sweetest coffee I've ever tasted. Either sprained and thin or full. Worn flip flops. I've never

seen so many clavicles. I wish you could be here. You would crimp your collarbone with your finger pads as you said it, jaw taut against the phone.

His uncluttered body settles itself, welds more deeply to the mattress; he faces you now, one hand between his thigh, the other open above his knees. You think of the deli owner's son and his easy leap up the stairs.

When you return, your friends will ask of your trip and you will say it was warm and beautiful. By this point, your shoulders will have begun to peel. You will tell him of their questions, your unwoven response, and you will agree neither of you can narrate or describe. When they ask, you will not think of the room—your mind skims to the border between water and cloud and the humid shallow streets and the smoke he desires after a first sip of beer. Later, how it tastes in your mouth. To remember its high ceilings is your private punishment, derivative, finite in its utility and circulation of air. That week you ate insatiably, as if he would take food from your plate. The shiny-scaled fish you ate, eye and all.

moonmilk Alexander Laurin

Wool-gathering

Daisy Bassen

What is a thought? is the meaning
Of the name I might give myself,
If I came from a tradition of picking
A name upon some great alteration
Or when you reach an age whose value
Is a factor of seven, because seven
Is the age of no turning back,
If you want to believe Aristotle.
Or you can find another reason;
Maybe seven is the number that feels best
When you say it, when you think it,
Seven is a thought, an abstraction
In an abstraction, the name for the discrete,
For counting, lethera if you want sheep
To be intrinsic to the number, ready to bleat,
Ready to fall off a cliff without a sheepdog
To keep them from oblivion, lethera
Ready to fall into hovera, to fall back into pip,
The thought of numbers, elegant and rude,
Jostling, jostled, unsheared, sheepdipped,
The grass part of it and the sky, cloudless,
Waiting for clouds; clouds can be a thought,
A shape, a lamb butting against an ewe,
The milk spilled, the cloud tearless, untethered
From itself when you fly through, incarnate
Again when you fly above. My name
Might be a question, unanswerable,
I would be unanswerable, in the manner
Of an empress, in the manner of a citizen
With unalterable rights. You couldn't call me
And expect me to respond for thinking,
For being sheer between two mirrors.

Swimming Children

Adèle Contis

The pit-pat of feet pouring on the tiles
then the jump, they
confront the liquid
as free as kingfishers
the children—hunters of joy.

They sway from side to side, surrendering
to the innocent lullaby,
warm under the water's shell
they curl in the oyster womb
like a precious pearl.

The water, with vengeance, invades their lungs
birthing them up
to the surface where they
notice their new weight,
their lost wings, and yet,
they keep their birdsong.

Gabrielle Drolet

Interview

Gabrielle Drolet is a Montreal-based freelance journalist, essayist, and cartoonist. Her debut book, Look Ma, No Hands: A Chronic Pain Memoir, releases in May 2025. Scrivener's Dana Prather met with Drolet and her rescue ringneck dove, Pidgey, in February. Their conversation follows.

SCRIVENER

What made you decide to move here?

GABRIELLE DROLET

I was in Toronto before to do my Masters, then I left for medical leave. I had only been there eight months. I moved for school. I was no longer a student, and I really wanted to live alone because I work from home and spend so much time in my space, but it's not really affordable to live alone in Toronto on a freelance writer's salary. I had a friend who lived in Montreal in this apartment and jokingly was like, "Oh, I'm moving into a bigger apartment down the street to live with my girlfriend. Wouldn't it be funny if you took over my lease?" Then he told me how much his lease was, and I was like, okay! (laughs) It was fully on a whim.

SCRIVENER

That's as good a reason as any. Do you feel like Montreal is home now?

GABRIELLE DROLET

Yeah, I felt that way very quickly. I think Montreal is such an open city. I was nervous that because I was working fully remotely and wasn't a student that I wouldn't have a lot of opportunities to meet people. But I settled into this apartment really quickly, and I met so many incredible people. That made me feel really welcomed to the city. I have a hard time imagining ever living elsewhere now. Before that, I was living in a really small town in Nova Scotia. I enjoyed it, but it felt very isolated. So the contrast of then being here in a big city with just so many opportunities for community building is really cool.

SCRIVENER

Do you feel like that's affected the way you work at all, or what kind of work you're doing?

GABRIELLE DROLET

The fact that there's a lot of community here? Yes and no. Most of my work is still fully remote. Because of my disability, I wasn't able to type for a long time. Now I can type a lot more, but I need a really ergonomic workspace, so physically, I can't bring my laptop to a cafe. I have to work at home, so even though I live in Montreal, I'm not necessarily doing more community-based work. That being said, I am engaging in my community externally in a really nice way. I've met a lot of Montreal-based writers. I go to a lot of the journalism events here. It's really sweet that I'm invited to these things because, as a freelancer, it's easy to feel isolated from the broader community. Also, I'm sure you noticed in my office, I have two desks. When it's just me, I use one desk for drawing and the other for computer work. But I always joke that the reason I have two chairs in there is because the second is the friend desk. It can feel really cabin feverish to not be able to work outside of my apartment, so once a week or so, I'll have someone come over and co-work. It changes the shape of my day, but my work itself hasn't changed.

SCRIVENER

Do you have an ideal “shape” for your work day? Is it a bit of writing, a bit of art?

GABRIELLE DROLET

It depends on what's going on, what my deadlines are. My ideal work day is I get up after a solid nine hours of sleep. I've never been a meal-prepping person, so I take a lot of time out of my day to cook and listen to audiobooks. The work itself is so variable. This week, for example, I’ve had so many deadlines and meetings, which is unusual. That’s made for longer work days, which is hard, but then I'm able to take today off. I need a lot of breaks for my body. I usually have a timer set for every 45 minutes to get up, stretch, and stop whatever I'm doing. Having a few different kinds of work is also great in that the physicality of typing is just different than drawing. I get up early; I'm always most productive in the morning. I make my tea and my breakfast. I write until I'm done whatever I'm working on. I draw until I'm done whatever I'm working on. I go to the post office and ship some prints. I come home, and my work day’s done. No two days are the same. The one thing with freelancing that's tough—and it's fully a me problem—is that I can be bad about saying yes to too many things. Or sometimes deadlines get pushed around, then suddenly you have so much going on. You can have one week with so much to do, and then the next there's nothing really. During those slower periods, I can draw or write for fun, or work on a grant application, or do my taxes. You get to do the administrative work and also the creative work that feels really fulfilling.

Then there are days where it's just like, “Okay, I have deadlines, so I have to do this stuff.” I try to just wake up and figure out what the priorities are, then do them in a way that feels natural and good and doesn't require me to physically push myself too hard. My work days are long. I start early and I end late, but that's because I take a lot of breaks throughout the day to go for a run or work out and watch Drag Race. It means that my work days take longer, but it also means that they're not causing me as much physical pain or mental strain.

SCRIVENER

How do you feel that workflow fits with the demands of the publishing world, whether that's writing your book or working freelance?

GABRIELLE DROLET

I think it fits in really nicely. Obviously there are days where I'm on a tight deadline. But I'm lucky because I'm not in hard news, so I'm not writing things that are super timely. Generally, there's leeway. If I'm having a much busier work week, I can email an editor and be like, “Hey, can I have an extra day?” Conversely, I can hand something in early if I want to arrange my time differently. Everyone I work with is just so open and understanding about the fact that I have a lot going on. Not that I'm pushing deadlines back very often. Generally, I'm given so much time and space to work on something that it doesn't feel like I'm overloading myself or like I have to sit down and work for 12 hours straight. I have an editor who emailed me earlier this week. He was like, “We want a young person to write this essay, and I thought of you, are you interested?” I was like, “Absolutely. I'll get it to you by the end of the week.” Then today, I woke up and did a bit of work, and I was like, I'm so tired. He had never given me a firm deadline, so I emailed him and was like, “I'm so sorry. Can I turn this in on Monday instead? I can do it today if it needs to be done, but I'm feeling a little burnt out.” And he was like, “Do it next Friday. It's not timely. Who cares?” And I was like, “Wow, thank you!” That's one of those things where I will do it on Monday because I don't like having things hanging over me. But it's really nice to know that if ever for whatever reason I ask for more time, it doesn't tend to be an issue.

SCRIVENER

How has the shift from undergrad to grad school to full-time freelancing been?

GABRIELLE DROLET

I was at my student newspaper in undergrad, and I started freelancing in third and fourth year. I was taking on way more than I could do because I wanted to prove myself as a writer.

Also because I wanted to pay down my student loans. So weirdly, undergrad was the most overloaded and stressful time. During my Master's, I was also freelancing almost full-time, but it was nothing like undergrad because all of my schoolwork felt manageable and exciting.

But the long and short of what happened in the second semester of my first year of grad school is that I developed a nerve issue, and very suddenly I couldn't type or hold a pencil. I had all these deadlines that I was pushing myself to try and meet, and voice-to-text is just slower generally, so that was a really hard adjustment, and that's why I ended up leaving grad school. I had a workload I just couldn't manage, and being disabled is really expensive. I needed to afford physio and ergonomic stuff which meant choosing between school and full-time freelancing, and writing made more sense. Well, writing and fact-checking and all of the work that supplements my income. I cannot overemphasize that just being a full-time freelance writer is doable, but it's really hard. It's not something that I've ever been interested in because I like being financially stable (laughs). I like making my student loan payments and rent and not being stressed.

When I went back to grad school to write my thesis, which is my book, it was hard. That was a lot of writing, but at that point I was better at voice-to-text. My first year of full-time freelancing, I was really overloaded because I felt unable to say no to anything. There was this worry that if I turned something down, I would never get that opportunity again. I was exhausted. Now, I think it's balanced out. It's funny looking back because school seems way more inconsequential. Why was I stressing myself out so much? Why was I doing so much? I got a lot out of my degrees, but I'm happy to be focusing on work now.

SCRIVENER

You said you started with student journalism. Even then, were you tapping into your own life as a creative well? I sense that a lot of the essays and your book comes from that.

GABRIELLE DROLET

Absolutely. As a student journalist, I wrote for the Culture section before moving to Opinions. I wanted to write more about myself, but we were publishing things exclusively related to school, so my first freelance pieces were all opinion pieces and personal essays where I was writing about my own experiences. My first ever freelance piece was for *The Globe and Mail*. It was a reader-submitted essay about how I love tarot cards.

When they published me, even though it was an unpaid opportunity and not a real freelance project, I felt really bolstered. I was like, "Oh, that was really satisfying to write about something I cared about in such a way that other people might care about it." Once I got that itch, that was it. (Pidgey squawks) Sorry, she has so much to say. (Both laugh). Over the years, my favourite projects to work on have been essays, especially reported essays. I've done a lot of straight up reporting as well. I worked as a reporter at *The Coast*, a newspaper in Halifax, which was fun, but I always preferred essay writing and that kind of lofty, personal culture writing. I'm really glad that I've been able to do that throughout my career, and that's most of what I do now, which is really fun and special.

SCRIVENER

I'd love to hear about your approach to what you write about and how you connect to it on a personal level because you find so much whimsy in things that might be labeled ordinary, like crosswords and trains. It's beautiful that you can find inspiration anywhere.

GABRIELLE DROLET

I really appreciate that. I'm laughing because I've never thought of it that way, but it's so true. I'm just like, "Yeah, let me write 4000 words on pigeons." Early on in my career, most of the essays I was pitching were more timely or had some sort of news hook, because I hadn't cut my teeth yet. It's hard when people don't know your work to argue that you could write an interesting essay about trains. Once I had a rapport with more editors, it felt easier to pitch things that I wanted to write about just because I cared about them. You can write an interesting essay about anything, I think, if you have a unique perspective and can argue why it's important. Sometimes I arrive at my pitches because I'll randomly think like, "Oh, I really care and want to write about this." Other times, it's reverse-engineered, where I'll be like, "I want to work with this editor or outlet. What could I write for them?" Then I look through their archives or recent articles and think, "It's weird they've never written about trains." (laughs) You know? Or there's a gap you can fill. Once you have an idea, it's just a matter of making it personal and relevant and interesting, which can be hard. Sometimes you pitch something and the editor says no, and then you think back on it, and you're like, "Why did I think anyone would want to read that?"

SCRIVENER

How did you arrive at your thesis topic, and how did that develop into memoir territory?

GABRIELLE DROLET

When the stuff with my hands first started, I stopped freelancing and writing personal essays for a bit because it was really overwhelming, and I didn't really know how to write about it. Then when I finally started again, I began writing about disability and what I was going through. I was writing essays that approach disability and chronic pain in really unexpected ways. Honestly, I think one of the best things I've ever written, and I still love it so much and feel very strongly about it, is an essay on garlic. It received a really positive critical reception. Not that that's everything, but there were, like, famous chefs, and Bake Off contestants, random people who loved the essay and were sharing it. It made me realize that people care about disability narratives, even if they might not think they do. When we think about disability and chronic pain, it's a really heavy and daunting topic. A lot of people don't consider it to be a topic they would want to read about, but it impacts so much, from the way we eat to the way we cook. After that essay, I really felt fueled to write more about those topics from a variety of angles. I ended up having an accessibility cooking column for a while which was really fun.

But my goal with my MFA was to write a novel. That was always my dream, so I wrote the first 20,000 words with voice-to-text, and they were very bad. The way you speak is not the way you write, so my voice was different. I was so frustrated. Michael Winter, my advisor, was like, "Oh my God, just write about what you're going through. That's obviously the answer." At that point, I had been writing about disability for a year and enjoying it, so finally I was like, "Why would I write something else right now?" It was clear that was what I had to do. That was in January of my last semester of school. At that point, all my classmates had already written the first draft of their books. I wrote the entire book that semester because my novel was garbage. (laughs) I changed course, and I'm really glad I did. I was so proud of my thesis, and I still am. It hasn't even changed a ton for publication. I had a lot to say. A lot more to say than I thought I did.

SCRIVENER

What was the process of taking it from thesis form to the finished book? How did you navigate shopping around at publishers, or figuring out what the next step was to publish work as a book?

GABRIELLE DROLET

I had no idea, because publishing is really opaque. I'm glad I did an MFA; I don't think I would have written a book if I hadn't, but we didn't learn much about that process.

When I was finishing school, I reached out to Elamin Abdelmahmoud, who I think is one of the best writers in Canada right now. I am such a fan of his work—I think he's so funny and brilliant. I first reached out to him at a student journalism conference, and I was like, (fake pleading) "I want to be a writer too, but I don't know how!" And he bought me breakfast and talked to me. Years later, I went back to him, and I was like, "Hey, I love your book. How did you publish it?" And he met with me and we talked about agents and the whole process of pitching them because I wanted to do something similar to his first book, which was also a memoir composed of a collection of essays. I was telling him about my book and the fact that I had already written it, and then he texted his agent. It's one of the nicest things anyone's ever done for me. I don't think I would have published a book without him. He connected us and really vouched for my work, and she took me on. Within a few months, she had sold the book to Penguin. And that was it. I didn't know anything about publishing, and I still don't. But I think Canadian publishing is really special. Obviously, like some people feel an edge of competitiveness, and it's a small industry, but for the most part, people are so open and willing to help. That's been a theme my whole career. I published essays and cartoons because editors were willing to take a chance on me, and because other journalists were willing to guide me, and the book was the same. I would not have been able to do that if not for the kindness of people in my industry, which is really special.

SCRIVENER

What has the timeline been like?

GABRIELLE DROLET

Slow. I started writing it in January of 2023, then in June, I defended it as my thesis and passed my masters. (laughs) Thank God. We sold it to specifically McClelland and Stewart, which is an imprint of Penguin Random House, Canada, that October. They'd purchased the book, and then they had other things going on, and then suddenly it was like, there's edits. Then I did the illustrations. It comes out in May, so a year and a half after they first bought the rights to it. I've also had Pidgey since last October. I got her from the SPCA for $15 right after the sale of the book. She's the perfect pet for someone who works from home in that she doesn't require a ton of attention—she wants to be near the action, but does not want to participate. And she's been with me for the whole process.

SCRIVENER

You do a lot of the illustrations for your own writing. Is that how you prefer it?

GABRIELLE DROLET

Yeah, I think so. Generally, people in the arts are like, "You have to find your niche." And I was like, "No, I'm gonna write and also do cartoons separately." In February of 2021, I sold my first cartoon to *The New Yorker*, and it was like, "Holy shit, this is the thing I've always wanted." Then two weeks later, I couldn't draw anymore. Now that I can draw again, I'm figuring out how to marry it with writing. I did a year and a half as an editorial cartoonist at *The Globe and Mail* with this editor, Mark, who I've written with for a long time. He was one of the first people who was like, "why don't you do the illustration for the stuff that you're writing with us? You already do cartoons." But with the book, it's funny. When publishers saw that I had 'Cartoonist' in my bio, they were like, "Oh, this should be a graphic memoir!" I felt really opposed to it because they felt like fully separate things to me. It's funny: at that stage, I was more well-known as a cartoonist than a writer, even though I'd written for longer and produced much more writing. I really didn't like that. I was like, "No, I want to be a writer who sometimes does cartoons, not a cartoonist who sometimes writes." Finally, my agent made me realize I was being silly, and that actually I am a writer *and* a cartoonist. I'm glad we didn't change the book too much, because I really think that it shines as a written text. I was resistant to marrying my writing and cartoons for a long time. I just had a mental block about it, but now it feels really fun to be combining them. I want to find a way to do that again with my next book.

SCRIVENER

Are you thinking of your next project already?

GABRIELLE DROLET

(laughing) Yeah, I am. I know a lot of writers who work on more than one book at once, or who as soon as one thing is done are onto the next. But because this is my first one, and it was so different from what I expected in terms of content and form, I thought I would take a longer beat. However, it feels like it would be prudent to apply for grants and funding before an election happens. I've known for a while what I want the next book to be, but I'm having to act on it sooner than I otherwise would because of the very practical side of funding.

SCRIVENER

How do you handle the planning of long-term versus short-term projects, and how do you balance giving yourself breaks with the realities of being a freelancer?

GABRIELLE DROLET

It's funny because until this book, I hadn't ever really had to think about that because

I had never had long-term projects. It's really hard to plan long-term stuff as a freelancer, and it's hard to plan breaks. But I worked really hard last year selling the book and finishing grad school and doing so much, so I took a month off in the summer to go to Europe and see Taylor Swift. I was like, "You know what? It's time for me to take a break."

SCRIVENER

I know you're gearing up to do more interviews and go on a book tour as we approach the launch date. How much of the book's roll out comes from the publisher's vision?

GABRIELLE DROLET

One of the main benefits of working with a big publisher is that they handle everything for you. As a freelancer, I'm so used to doing everything myself. Like a little while ago, an editor at *Maisonneuve* asked if I wanted to write something for the winter issue. I reached out to my editor at Penguin, and was like, "Hey, what if I sent an essay from the book for them to publish? Wouldn't that be fun?" And she immediately was like, "It's so sweet that you're thinking about this. You have a publicist who is going to deal with that. Don't worry your little head about it, we've got it." And I was like, "I have a publicist? What do you mean?!" Then, sure enough, I do, and she's now someone I'm working with, which is awesome, but I'm really not used to letting go of the reins. I think I will get some say about where we go for the book tour, but on the whole, I don't really have to think about any of the details, which feels really foreign and really nice.

SCRIVENER

Do you have a sense of where would you want to be this time next year?

GABRIELLE DROLET

What going through the stuff with my hands taught me is that life takes shape in ways that are hard to predict. So I have vague goals for this time next year. I would like to be able to do a pull up. (Both laughing) I would like to be better at drawing anatomy. I would like to have a better sleep schedule. I would like to start submitting more cartoons to magazines. My hope for next year is that I am feeling fulfilled by whatever I'm doing, and that I have positive relationships with the editors I work with, and maybe a new book that I'm working on. Otherwise, that I'm happy and healthy and maybe that I have health insurance. That would be nice.

SCRIVENER

Fingers crossed for health insurance.

Dana Prather
This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

February
Natalie Co

Open bar.
Beer can falls from heavens. Ballroom blooming sleepwalkers. Girl-shaped wooden block.

Deep sea.
Old TV. Squid entangling CRT, sweetly bulbous head pressed to convex screen.

JBL Clip 3.
Khruangbin: faraway guitar, fuzzed heart. Septembers ago, Mariella
aubade float.

transition Elisia Wong

*On Visiting the Maude Abbott Medical Museum**

Avryl Bender

This was an incidental finding
in a man who died of liver failure
(so was this poem).

Abbott specimen 3: congenitally bicuspid aortic valve with an obliterated raphe.

Do you remember the cracking open of ribs,
the first exposure to air; was there a pacer, a pig,
a sacrificial saving?

What was it like to be exposed
on the surgeon's table in the aftermath
of *development gone awry?*

Congenital (adj.): (often of a disease or defect) belonging to one from birth.

This brown mass
came wrapped in life with a promise:
"I will kill you."

Bicuspid (adj.): having two cusps or points.

But what is a cuspid?
on the cusp of what? what point?
what do you point to?
what two-ness?

Raphe (n.): a seam-like line or ridge, especially of a bilaterally symmetrical organ.

Is this proof of a seamstress or a system,
did she sew the mid-ocean ridge also?

The aortic valve consists of two leaflets,
(the mark of the seamstress)
one intact and the other cut in two during prosection
(dissecting and protecting).
There is only mild fibrosis
(there is only a little too-much-ness).

Could I resuscitate the heart, if I wrote a poem now, or am I mortician re-constructing what is already dead into what is beautiful, off-kilter, yet familiar?

**Italicized specimen and exhibit language is excerpted from the Maude Abbott Medical Museum at McGill University, with definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary.*

Mirror Isabelle Avola

The Mountains

Medrie Purdham

The goats turned their rumps to us, found us improbable.
Our graceless fingers never skimmed their coarse hair.

The mountains were at their very best: they weren't
of homework or dishes. Nobody promised

to move them, they weren't symbols of our striving.
We had no striving. It was a foolscap season,

all our efforts scrap paper gliders. Our parents were young
and fair-isle, and we were the kind of blonde

a person outgrows. Velour little brother
blobbed against rock, an octopus disguising itself,

and we dove against his soft belly in a frenzy.
Later, pinned to an altitude, he slept in the cablecar,

the treetop-baby from the song, sandbag to
a creaking bough. The mountains weren't

buckling in the basement anymore, they
were there to stay. We were aerially fastened to the

thought of our own continuation. Had we sung,
one note might have followed upon the other.

ATOM VOLUME

Patrick O'Reilly

The body is open concept:
there's room enough for anyone
at this party, so long as you
squeeze. Inhale, push
toward the exit.

The Holy Ghost is mostly sheet.
The Heavenly Father abhors a vacuum.
Horror vacui: the reason for
Hic sunt dracones on dark age maps;
reason the Son built chair upon chair,
and heaped them up to the rafters.
Folks are just trying to live in the moment.
In Heaven Above, there's more chairs than arses.

Accept it: you're mostly nothing,
blank space, dead weight. Air, water, and tax.
Somebody asks if anyone's seen you,
seen you, and Anyone shrugs.

The balcony is quiet enough to hear
each flake of tobacco shrivel and whiten,
shrivel and whiten. You can hear
everything living at atom volume.
In the moment,
you needn't matter.

CONTRIBUTORS

Kristina Tham is a U2 English Literature and Economics double major. She is interested in capturing the moments we often let pass us by.

Derek Webster's first book Mockingbird (Véhicule Press) was a Gerald Lampert Award finalist for best poetry debut in Canada. His second collection, National Animal, won the 2024 QWF A.M. Klein Prize for Poetry. Webster received an MFA from Washington University in St. Louis and founded arts magazine Maisonneuve. He lives in Montreal.
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Cristina Holman is a poet, librarian and ceramic artist living and working on the unceded territories of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxw ú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh). Their debut chapbook, published with Artspeak Gallery in 2018, is titled Stop Wincing/We're Fine and their second chapbook, Repeater, was published in 2021 by Zed Press . Their work can be found in Bad Nudes magazine, Poetry is Dead, and The Capilano Review. Cristina is in the midst of writing their first full-length collection of poetry.

Struck in liminal spaces and dreamscapes, **Sophie Cao's** work explores themes of yearning, alienation, and grief. She draws inspiration from fragments of life and childhood while incorporating motifs and narratives inspired by her studies in English literature, conveying the universal process of metamorphosis. Her work primarily revolves around portraying psychological landscapes through the continual mutilation and recomposition of mundane objects and everyday scenes, mimicking the cyclical nature of rumination. Cao is an emerging artist based in Toronto and Montreal, currently pursuing her BA at McGill University.

Hannah Berger writes prose stories and makes drawings and installations. She was born in London, Ontario and now lives and works in the great city of Montreal, Quebec. She is working on a collection of short stories that will someday see the light of day.

Susan Robertson grew up outside Washington, D.C. but has made her home in Canada for years. Her poems have appeared in journals in Canada and the United States including Prairie Fire, Parentheses, the Offing, Grain, HAD, The Ex-Puritan and Psaltery & Lyre. Baseline Press will publish her first chapbook in 2025.

Tim Loveday is a poet and educator. He won the 2022 & 2024 Dorothy Porter Poetry Award and the 2023 Venie Holmgren Environmental Poetry Award, and was a finalist in the 2023 David Harold Tribe Poetry Prize and 2024 Montreal International Poetry Prize. You can find out more at: timloveday.com.

Dana Prather (they/she) is a student of English: Drama & Theatre and Psychology at McGill University hailing from Treaty 7 Territory. Though primarily a theatre artist, they also enjoy experimenting with writing (personal non-fiction, cultural criticism, poetry, recipes, and rambling to-do lists), fibre arts, and film photography. Inspirations as of late include the works of Mary Oliver, Rocky Mountain sunsets, and Portra 400 film. You can find more of their musings and photos on Instagram @dana_prather

Alex O'Neill is a queer poet born and raised in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal. He has been previously published in McGill University's International Relations Review and The Encore Poetry Project. He is fond of obscure jazz records, craft beer, foreign policy, and shinrin yoku.

H.E. Fisher is the author of the collection STERILE FIELD (Free Lines Press, 2022) and chapbook JANE ALMOST ALWAYS SMILES (Moonstone Arts Center Press, 2022). H.E.'s poems have appeared in Tupelo Quarterly, Psaltery & Lyre, Ligeia Magazine, Whale Road Review, and Pithead Chapel, among other publications. H.E. was awarded City College of New York's 2019 Stark Poetry Prize and has received nominations for Best of the Net and The Pushcart Prize. H.E. is a recipient of the Poets Afloat and 2024 inaugural Stonecrop Gardens residencies. H.E. currently lives in the Hudson River Valley.

Zoe Lubetkin is a writer from Michigan based in Montreal. Her fiction and reporting can be found in, respectively, carte blanche and The East Hampton Star, and her story "Too big, the

perfect size" was published in Yolk in November after receiving second place in the inaugural Montreal Fiction Prize.

Alexander Laurin is a student at McGill University interested in philosophy as well as political and historical thought. Compelled foremost by encounters with nature in his photography, be they rock-walls, canopies, or light's heavy hand, Alexander looks for the tentative shapes, architectures, or motions that constitute 'experience' as he has come to know it. His poetry carries this obsession, only these images are long-exposed over one another and threaded with personal reflections on time, history, love, and sublimity.

Daisy Bassen is a poet and community child psychiatrist who graduated from Princeton University's Creative Writing Program and completed her medical training at The University of Rochester and Brown. Her work has been published in Salamander, McSweeney's, Smartish Pace, Plume, New York Quarterly, and [PANK] among other journals. She was the winner of the So to Speak 2019 Poetry Contest, the 2019 ILDS White Mice Contest, the 2020 Beullah Rose Poetry Prize, and the 2022 Erskine J Poetry Prize. She lives in Rhode Island with her family. Her fiction is represented by Jennifer Lyons of Jennifer Lyons Agency.

Adèle Contis is a third-year undergraduate student in English and Philosophy at McGill University. She writes to soothe the itch, bitten by images that cling to her—sometimes, she sings them too. In the future, she hopes simply to keep writing, for a poem, like a ripe fruit, is enough to sustain her.

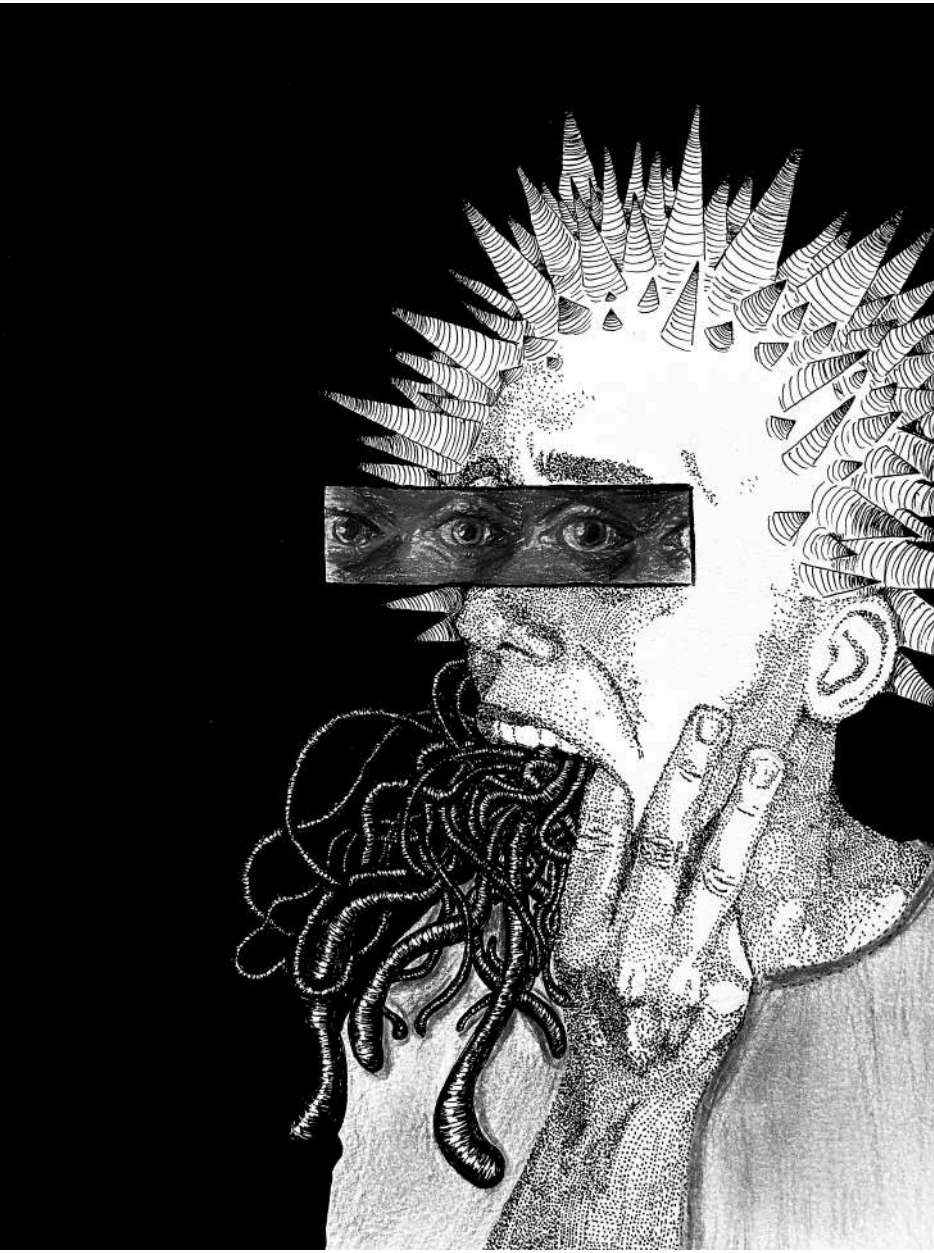
Natalie Co is a writer living in Montreal, where she is the co-president of McSway Poetry Collective and Poetry Curator for Forget The Box. Her work has appeared in SQUID, the Encore Poetry Project anthology, and The Imagist. She can be found haunting grocery stores after dark and languishing near large bodies of water.

Avryl Bender is from rural southern Ontario and she is currently completing her last semester as an undergraduate student at McGill University in Honours English Literature with a minor in French Language and Literature. She has published one poem in The Imagist and was the recipient of the Mona Elaine Adilman Prize in 2024.

Elisia Wong is a student at McGill University interested in a little bit of everything: poetry, literature, art, photography, politics, figure skating, and especially this magazine.

Isabelle Avola is a painter located in Montreal. She aims to study metaphysical properties of AI through incorporating their non-human elements into her work. As a recent convert to buddhism, working in parallel with digital neural networks serves as a practice in remembering what cannot be reached through objective studies of material reality. Despite some pieces being photo realisitic, she hopes to capture the secret third thing that these scenes often evoke- what is behind a sky? Or a glance to a dear friend?

Medrie Purdham teaches on Treaty 4 territory at the University of Regina. Her book Little Housewolf (Véhicule, 2021) won a Saskatchewan Book Award and was longlisted for the Gerald Lampert Award and the Fred Cogswell Award. She has been a finalist for the Vallum Chapbook Award, the Arc Poem of the Year contest and the Montreal International Poetry Prize. She has been published several times in Best Canadian Poetry (Tightrope Books). She is a McGill University alumna.

Patrick O'Reilly is a poet from Renews, NL. Patrick's second chapbook, Demographics Report November 2023, was released by Cactus Press in 2024.

Elias Doering is a visual artist from Holden, Maine. They specialize in pen and ink art, depicting nature, people, and the in-between. They are currently thinking about fishing on a calm, foggy lake. You can find their work on Instagram at @f.shbone